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EDITORIAL: Wasting time

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Anyone familiar with immigration law was not surprised when a Texas federal judge on Wednesday threw out a Dallas suburb's ban on rentals to illegal immigrants, deeming the law unconstitutional and unenforceable.

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Yet the Louisiana Legislature is considering a bill, by Mandeville Rep. Tim Burns, that replicates the Dallas mistake by banning property rentals to illegal residents.

State lawmakers ought to stop wasting time on this and other ill-conceived immigration proposals. The bills are aimed at illegal immigrants but would create myriad problems for legal immigrants and U.S. citizens as well. And any legal defense of such laws would likely be futile and come at taxpayers' expense.

This newspaper is committed to a comprehensive solution to the immigration problem, but that should be handled by the federal government.

Rep. Burns proposal, House Bill 1365, would require that landlords check the legal residency or U.S. citizenship of every renter. Because many Americans don't have ready proof of citizenship, the bill would lead to bigotry and discrimination.

The Legislature has been this wrongheaded before. A 2002 law making it a felony to drive in Louisiana without proof of legal U.S. residency was later ruled unconstitutional and in conflict with federal statutes. Rep. Burns' bill has the same problems, and the House should reject it.

For the same reasons, the Senate Judiciary B Committee should kill three bad bills by Rep.

Mike Geymann of Lake Charles. House Bills 1357 and 1358 would make it a crime to "harbor, conceal or shelter" and to transport illegal residents. House Bill 25 would require law enforcement agencies to verify citizenship and immigration status of every person arrested -- again, something unenforceable without a ready way to prove citizenship.

The sad title of worst anti-immigration bill this session, however, goes to House Bill 1380 by Labadieville Rep. Joe Harrison. It mandates the state to issue "biometric identification cards" to every non-U.S. citizen -- even legal residents with federally-issued "green cards."

Rep. Harrison's bill urges the use of state identification "because the sovereignty of the state must be protected" and declares that immigrants would be "admitted into Louisiana" -- at checkpoints along interstates, one presumes.

This is as nutty as the arguments of a Slidell dentist who tried to avoid paying federal taxes by renouncing his U.S. citizenship and declaring himself "a citizen of the Republic of Louisiana."

But Rep. Harrison's bill is not only redundant, ridiculous and likely unconstitutional. It's also expensive: \$45 million in the first five years, according to the Legislative Fiscal Office.

That expense, of course, would come on top of the public money already wasted by paying lawmakers for the time they've squandered debating these flawed bills.